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ABSTRACT

A rational approach to increasing the quality of infant caregiving environments requires knowledge of the interrelationships among three major aspects of caregiving: the adult, the infant and the environment in which care is provided. This presentation focuses on desired traits of caregivers and on the needs of infants. In addition to warm personal qualities, caregivers should have a belief in the personhood of a baby, knowledge of the institutional system in which caregiving is done, a sense of humor, sensitivity to individual differences among infants, ability to play enthusiastically and be creative with an infant, an understanding of the necessity of firm and fair limits, receptivity to early talking efforts and a willingness to model language, and an ability to match performance with the developmental levels of individual children. Babies need satisfying attachments with the special people who care for them, floor freedom, learning experiences they can assimilate, the opportunity to learn social skills such as respect for the rights of others and helpfulness, and adults who are sensitive to their present levels of competence and who provide appropriate environments, experiences and toys. A baby whose learning is precious to the caregiver has a firm base from which to grow. (Author/RH)

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What Are the Needs of Infants?

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A rational approach to increasing the quality of infant caregiving environments requires that we look at the interrelationships among three major aspects of caregiving: the adult, the infant and the environment in which care is provided. This presentation will focus particularly on who is the caregiver and on the needs of infants.

Who Is The Caregiver?

An infant caregiver needs to be convinced of the personhood of a baby. For some adults this is a difficult, perhaps even ludicrous idea... that a baby is a person, with rights and responsibilities. Infants are often conceptualized as helpless cuddly blobs in need of total direction and control from an adult. This attitude may lead to alert and sensible protectiveness. It may also on occasion lead to insensitivity to the personhood of the baby. In a day care center, for example, each of us has to make the effort to tell infants and toddlers about our daily routines and to help them understand our comings and goings. Based on their research in toddler day care centers, Tyler and Dittman (1980) comment that adults rarely shared their comings and goings with the children. "Because this did not happen, the basic day-to-day operations of the center remained unknown to the children, in contrast to the casual learning that naturally occurred in home care." Dittman comments that additionally, "It was clear that physical contact between toddler and caregiver was minimal" (p. 43).

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Thus, the caregiver, busy with daily rules and routines, may tend to disregard the primary needs of infants for physical cuddling, holding and touching.

The sensitivity of infants to adult respect is sometimes extraordinary. Once, in an infant care setting, as a consultant, I had been sitting companionably beside a 7 month old. He rocked and sucked on a piece of plastic toy. I looked in vain in the vicinity of the infant for a toy that he could shake or use in more interesting play. As I got up from the floor to go search for a rattle in a toy box at the far end of the room, Jason burst into tears. Immediately aware of my ungracious action, I turned and faced the baby. "Jason, are you crying because you thought I was getting up to leave you? I am so sorry. I was just going over to the toy box to see if I can find you a more interesting toy to play with. I promise you that I shall be right back." The child regarded me and immediately ceased wailing. Later, most of the day care workers (for whom this modeling was part of their training program) confessed that they had believed I had been a bit crazy to talk so seriously to a baby. Yet babies need validation of their good selves and their right to human courtesies and considerations. Children respond on a deep somatic and psychological level to positive valuation by their special adults.

An infant caregiver needs to understand the institutional system in which he or she is operating. What kinds of supports are available? If there are no toys for a 9 month old to shake or bang or a 12 month old to insert into containers, will staff supervisors be responsive to requests to purchase developmentally appropriate and enriching materials? If a parent is insulting to a caregiver, are there personnel to back up the dignity of the caregiver? In a center for unwed teen parents a caregiver once

reported in tears that one mother acted as if "I am her maid or baby sitter" instead of the infant caregiver, a special person who needs to be considered as a team partner with the parent in providing an optimal environment for the infant's growth. Sensitivity to parents' needs is also important for the caregiver. One teen mother in a day care center growled "Shut up you" to her five week old infant as she woke the baby by unpractised handling as she changed the infant's diaper. The baby had whimpered. A caregiver moved gently to the changing table, and reassured the mother with a warm hand on her shoulder. "She is not trying to annoy you. She just feels a little startled at being suddenly awakened because you need to change her before going home." A system of reciprocal sensitivities of caregivers and supervisors and parents can further a warm accepting, positive climate for infant care.

A caregiver needs a sense of humor. A toddler is likely to be long on will and short on skills and style. Upsets and spills and toy strings tangled around chair legs can fray tempers. A bit of humor at the trials and tribulations of toddlerhood struggling to meet new developmental demands from the grown-up world and from autonomous strivings within can help a caregiver clean up or rescue a baby or tolerate some toddler difficulties with less wear and tear on both persons.

The caregiver who wishes to respect the rights of each infant will need to become attuned to the different eating and sleeping and moving tempos and styles of each child in care. Some eat mighty slowly. Some sleep much less than others. Some cannot be rushed. Others retain a sunny temperament even if a caregiver hurries things along a bit. Pacing activities and expectations to each individual baby can help reduce tears and tantrums. Such caring and attention to the quality of the relationship

between the adult and baby will go far toward building the basic trusting relationship and reciprocal responsiveness to each other's needs that characterizes optimal caregiver infant transactions (Bromwich et al., 1978).

Caregivers need a little "show-biz" in their souls. Slithering on floors with toddlers and waving and billowing a great green bed sheet as if you are both fishes swimming in an ocean requires a certain lack of self-consciousness and ability to play and be creative with a very small child that may not come easily for some adults. Adults who are self-conscious about what a co-caregiver will think if this kind of creative, imaginative play goes on may be helped if they remember that the primary purpose of the job is to help babies flourish - and not to keep ourselves safely sedate in the eyes of others. Babies love an adult who is willing to enter into a game of peek-a-boo, to play "this little piggy goes to market," to dance about while whirling soap bubbles in the air for toddlers to run after with squeals of rapture. A caregiver who tries stretching imaginative powers will find that these may grow with use.

One interesting way for caregivers to feel more comfortable about floor games and creative games with babies is to do some internal personal history searching. Inside each of us are old record players. Some records play positive praises and comforting comments from our past. Some of our records carry warning, shaming prohibitions about being a silly child, a naughty child, a bad baby. A caregiver needs to leave on the nurturant positive record players that can support and encourage safe explorations and expressions of curiosity and delight. She or he may have to work hard to turn off punitive and disapproving records playing from the past. Such hard work will pay off as the caregiver becomes a person

who is freer to enjoy babies with their "messiness" and with their delightful whimsies.

Enjoying babies does not mean that we may not often have to set firm and fair limits. Developmental tasks and advances must indeed be encouraged, even when toddlers find them difficult to achieve. But acceptance of the less orderly aspects of babyhood (as when banana is seen carefully and thoroughly smeared on Timmy's face and hair as a caregiver turns from tending to another tot) can come easier if we turn off old record players full of old angers expressed perhaps towards us in our own early years for having "made a mess."

A caregiver needs to be a great talker. Babies may come silent into group care. Some families may not know how important it is to nourish the early coos and babbles and words of infants and toddlers. Some toddlers have much to express and only jargon strings with which to communicate very earnestly. A caregiver who boosts language is giving the priceless gift of a great power to babies. The power to communicate needs, wishes, observations, and conclusions about events can increase a toddler's assurance of his or her capability to articulate and stand up for those needs. A graduate student mother was eating breakfast with her toddler and mentioned having a lot of work to do in the college library. The 2½ year old looked up solemnly: "But Mommy, if you go away and Daddy is at work, then I will be left all alone at home," she exclaimed. Mother reassured Deanna that she would first take Deanna to her play group before going off to the library. Not many twos have been so well nourished in their language development to be able to express a fear or reason quite so syllogistically! Caregivers can be receptive to early talking efforts. They can model language wherever and whenever they

interact with a toddler. Diaper changing time, feeding time, preparation for nap time, and going-for-a-walk time are all good opportunities to listen to babies and talk and explain to babies. Telling stories to babies and looking at picture books together can create a confirmed (and still diapered) book lover.

Aside from warm personal qualities the infant caregiver needs one quality which provides a constant intellectual challenge...the quality to dance the developmental ladder. As a caregiver nurtures the learning career and the growth of loving kindness in her babies inevitably sometimes adult actions will be not quite appropriate. Sometimes babies will need us to slow down, or phrase our requests in a simpler way, or show a baby quite concretely "how to", or provide a distraction more attractive than the dangerous situation toward which she is headed, or set out a toy that is not as complicated as the frustrating one being hurled away. In all these cases caregiving challenges us intellectually. Can we meet more accurately the developmental match between our goals for the infant and the abilities and understandings the infant already has? If we are too far ahead of the baby on the developmental ladder can we find ways to dance down, to make the task easier? Is the baby bored? Can we dance up developmentally so that new tasks or activities are a bit more challenging, a bit more novel, a bit different from games baby already knows well how to play, tasks he or she has already accomplished?

In order to dance the developmental ladder with more ease and more accuracy it is very helpful to understand the tasks and games of each stage of infantile development and the developmental needs of babies in our care.

The Needs of Infants

The most important psychological need of the baby after needs for physical care and comfort are secured is the need to mean something good to the special adults who provide the care. Positive bonding and attachment to loving and beloved caregiver(s) provide the baby with the emotional security and energy to develop well. The baby seems to be learning "This person belongs to me for my good, my pleasure, my security. I feel cared for, cared about. I am delighted to be." An infant caregiver meets these needs best by providing many loving opportunities for interactions with a baby. Body contact promotes this secure feeling. Babies need dominion over a loved one's body. Physical, tangible feelings of well-being flow from being nuzzled on a shoulder, carried on a hip, snuggled on a lap, or given a gentle back rub. Body contacts also permits the baby to satisfy sensuous needs for warmth and touching, even licking and sniffing. Thus it is important in group care for the baby's well-being that caregivers hold bottle-fed babies for feedings.

Eye-contact and plain old-fashioned attention and admiration provide psychological vitamins for babies. Babies are sensitive to the quality of adult attention. Perfunctory ministrations cannot satisfy the baby's needs for mutually satisfying interactions. The caregiver and baby over time need to learn to satisfy each other's needs so that each takes increasing and more smoothly functioning satisfactions from the relationship. If the baby kicks too vigorously while his socks are being put on the adult may feel annoyed. In turn, if the caregiver starts to put one arm into a shirt, without noticing that the baby has extended the other arm in order to be helpful as dressing starts, the baby may feel unappreciated. Learn-

ing to read each other's signals promotes harmonious interchanges (Ainsworth and Bell, 1972; Beckwith, 1971).

Mutually satisfying attachments between baby and the special people who care for her or him do more than lay the groundwork for future positive emotional development. Positive attachment permits the baby to devote life energies to explorations, discoveries, and learnings. Matas, Arend & Sroufe (1978) found that securely attached babies were active in seeking physical contact or interaction with their parent on reunion after separation. This contact with the loved caregiver was effective in terminating distress and promoting a return to being absorbed in play. In their research, babies assessed for attachment at 18 months were brought at two years into a playroom with toys that required some problem solving. Those toddlers independently judged earlier to be more securely attached were found at two to be more enthusiastic, persistent, and cooperative than infants rated earlier as insecurely attached. Thus, secure attachment promotes adaptive explorations. The toddler is better organized for solving problems and for using the adult as a secure base from which to go and explore about. Securely attached babies called on the parent for help when a problem seemed quite difficult. Insecurely attached babies were less likely to try hard to solve the problems. They were more likely to have tantrums when tasks were difficult, and less likely to use a parent as a source of help. Loving responsiveness to a young baby's signals promotes not only good emotional health, but also promotes more competent behaviors in tool-using and problem solving tasks.

Babies need floor freedom. A safe, warm sturdy surface permits those stretchings of limbs and hitching up of the body that babies from a half year old onward will practice bravely and with serious concentration

over and over. Toys on the floor quite near to baby will lure the earliest attempts to corral and capture them, just as crib mobiles will entice swiping and striking and grasping at toys.

Babies need digestible learning experiences. To enhance the sensorimotor development of babies, tutors and materials for self-learning need to be provided in judicious doses. Piaget (1929) has provided us with great insights about the evolving understandings of babies with regard to the permanence of objects, the ins and outs, and ups and downs of space, the coordination of incoming information by different senses, and the separation of actions which are means from those which are goals. Helping the baby learn to increase the repertoire of actions, the understandings of how toys work, how people respond, what the rules of the world are like requires patient and persistent attempts at "matchmaking" well on the part of the caregiver (Honig, 1979). In one infant care room, a 9 month old baby was presented with a complicated busy-board toy. Many items were present on the gaily colored board. Some required a baby to push or to pull, or to use a special procedure, such as unhooking a latch, to make something happen. Such causal understandings were far beyond this baby's level. Cranky, she swept the bewildering board off the high chair tray where it had been placed. "What's the matter with you today. Don't you like any of the toys? Don't you want anything I give you?" asked the caregiver in a disappointed tone. Understanding Piagetian levels of infant developments helps a caregiver make appropriate choices of learning activities. Perceptive matchmaking by the caregiver permits the baby to explore and discover and deal with "the new" while secure in using already acquired learnings (Honig, 1978).

Babies need to learn social skills. Respect for the rights of others does not come easily. Sharing is very hard for a toddler. Provision of enough toys and ensuring that each child has a turn with a unique toy (such as a new wagon) can help a child begin to cope with adult demands for sharing. Learning to become a caring, helpful and friendly human is a long process. Babies need living giving models so they can gather the inner resources and know-how required gradually to become givers themselves. When babies are so raised, they often show surprisingly empathetic and thoughtful responses, such as covering resting Mommy, who may have a bad headache, with their very own precious blanket. Or if a caregiver stubs her toe and cries "Ouch" a toddler may offer her own beloved teddy bear as a consolation (Pines, 1979).

Space is a puzzlement for babies. Dr. Jerome Bruner has made a beautiful, slow-motion film of a 9 month old earnestly reaching for a cup half-filled with milk. The infant registers bewildered surprise as her own hand gradually brings the cup not directly to the place where her mouth is, but out of sight beyond her ear!

Learning to creep around obstacles rather than butt one's body against furniture barriers takes many tries. Even an older toddler, who has just seen his ball roll under a table, is likely to chase after the ball, retrieve it by ducking under the table, and then, forgetting that space above his head is bounded by the table surface, the toddler may stand up suddenly and bump his head hard.

Learning spatial relationships throughout the infancy period requires a lot of help from adults adept at dancing the developmental ladder. Lettie may be ready to nest just two orange juice cans. Juana may be ready to nest a whole set of Kitty-in-the-Keg barrels. One child struggles to put a

ring over the pole of the ring-toss set. Over and over the hard-at-work infant approaches the pole with the ring, only to find that the ring slides to the floor when not positioned with the hole directly over the pole. Another child is ready to experiment with stacking rings of different diameters on the pole in correct sequence. Some toys that require spatial understandings but also require adult sensitivity to the child's present level of competence are puzzle shapes and boards, large wooden beads, dumping and piling equipment, and stack and nest toys. Playground arrangements that permit a baby to pull up to standing, go around a detour, climb up, slide down, push equipment about, creep through or slither under will facilitate the development of spatial understandings.

Some toys can give a special boost to infant causality learnings. A toy telephone that chimes when buttons are pressed just so, a wind-up toy that pops open, a pull toy on a string -- these can help a baby learn how to make things work. Play with water, sand, or clay and finger paint and actions allows a baby to find out how to produce fantastic effects such as swirls, hand prints, water bubbles, slow drips, and even sandpies that keep their shape.

The baby whose caregiver is a judicious arranger of safe and somewhat challenging experiences will be able to direct her or his own discoveries and learnings. A perceptive adult can stretch attention spans, encourage persistence, and rejoice in infant learning and living efforts. Fortunately, there are available many resources to support caregivers wishing to provide wisely for the growth of infants (Badger & Edufax, 1971; Honig, 1979; Honig & Lally, 1975, 1979; Jones, 1976; Keister, 1975; Lally & Gordon, 1977; Lally, Honig & Caldwell, 1973; McDiarmid, Peterson

& Sutherland, 1975; Segal & Adcock, 1976; White, 1975; and Willis & Ricciuti, 1975).

A baby whose learning is precious to the caregiver will be more likely to feel significant in the world and find meaningful and worthwhile the efforts required gradually to make sense of the world of objects and people in which she or he is growing and to master those skills required for living confidently in the world.

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